

Local fire department to see in-house training as Ontario Fire College closes

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Shelburne Fire Department will be seeing more in-house training for firefighters as the Ontario Fire College campus prepares to close at the end of March, says Fire Chief Ralph Snyder.

The province announced the decision to close the Ontario Fire College campus located in Gravenhurst at the beginning of 2021, switching the training model for firefighters to be based out of regional training centres.

‘It hasn’t had the capacity to train the firefighters that we need trained for some time now,’ said Chief Snyder. ‘It needed to either expand or go to a different model, and they decided to do a different model.’

With the closure of the fire college campus, curriculum including basic firefighter training, certifying officers, public education, fire and life safety training will be done directly in Shelburne.

Snyder said training with fire and heat as well as fire investigations will likely be done through the regional training centres.

‘Some of this we will have our own instructors and some we will have to bring in outside instructors to do it, but they’ll come to us instead of us going to them is the biggest difference.’

The cost of sending fire personnel to the fire college for training was low at \$65 per person (travel, accommodations, and meals).

While the department will be able to save some money with in-house training Snyder notes that sending personnel to regional training centres will cost the fire department more.

‘Regional training centres don’t generally offer accommodations and meals, so if we travel any distance at all, we’re going to have to pay for that, other than that we don’t have a lot of costs.’

At this time, Snyder adds they don’t know how the costs will balance out in the fire service budget.

‘It’s a bit of a surprise to have this thrown around after you’ve already done your budgets for the year based on one model, and now we’ve completely changed models,’ said Snyder.

‘We don’t know where we’re at, at the moment.’

The closest regional training centre to Shelburne currently is located in Markdale, Highlands Fire Department.

While there are still many unknowns about the model change, Snyder said the Shelburne Fire Department is in a very stable place.

‘We have many firefighters that have been here for a long time and have already got their instructor certifications so I’m not in as bad a situation as some fire department will be, that don’t have the in-house capabilities.’

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the Ontario Fire College has not hosted on-site training. While the physical campus will be closed, the Ontario Fire College will continue to help with developing training courses.

The Ontario government announced last week they would be providing funding to support local fire services during COVID-19.

Shelburne is eligible to receive \$6,600 to enhance training needs.